

VZCZCXYZ0002
OO RUEHWEB

DE RUEHQT #0565/01 0682205
ZNY CCCCC ZZH
O 092205Z MAR 07
FM AMEMBASSY QUITO
TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC IMMEDIATE 6517
INFO RUEHBO/AMEMBASSY BOGOTA PRIORITY 6516
RUEHCV/AMEMBASSY CARACAS PRIORITY 2438
RUEHLP/AMEMBASSY LA PAZ MAR 0486
RUEHPE/AMEMBASSY LIMA PRIORITY 1494
RUEHGL/AMCONSUL GUAYAQUIL PRIORITY 2031
RHEFDIA/DIA WASHDC PRIORITY
RHMFISS/CDR USSOUTHCOM MIAMI FL PRIORITY

C O N F I D E N T I A L QUITO 000565

SIPDIS

SIPDIS

E.O. 12958: DECL: 03/08/2017
TAGS: [PGOV](#) [ASEC](#) [PINS](#) [KDEM](#) [EC](#)
SUBJECT: ECUADOR: CONGRESS SEEKING WAY OUT OF CRISIS;
CORREA DEFIANT

REF: QUITO 554

Classified By: Classified by PolOff James Cohen for reasons 1.4 (b) and (d)

11. (C) Summary: Reacting to footage of the beating of one opposition deputy by radical leftist protesters on March 8, influential media and other civil society leaders reacted strongly on March 9. Denouncing political infighting among Congress, the Electoral Tribunal (TSE), and the Correa government which culminated in 57 members of Congress losing their seats, media leaders blamed all sides for getting the country into the current mess. President of Congress Jorge Cevallos is promoting a deal with the TSE to return to the status quo before the series of dubious moves described RefTel. He has convoked a special session of Congress late on March 9 to discuss the issue. Meanwhile, President Correa gloated over what he characterized as a "victory" over opponents of the proposed national constituent assembly to rewrite the constitution, while exhorting his supporters to reject violence.

12. (C) The government is reportedly courting the substitutes that would replace the 57, seeking a more docile opposition. Opposition parties claim the substitutes will not show up to be sworn in on March 12, denying Congress a quorum. The Constitutional Court (TC) has called for dialogue and accepted for consideration Congress' case against the constitutionality of the national constituent assembly. But Correa has said he will ignore any TC finding, calling it a non-creditable institution under opposition party tutelage. While all of these machinations are taking place in Quito, the center of opposition strategizing is shifting to Guayaquil. End Summary.

Violence Draws Strong Civil Society Reaction

13. (U) The political crisis erupted in violence on March 8, when a mob organized by the far-left Movement for Popular Democracy attacked an opposition deputy (Oswaldo Flores of the PRIAN) when he attempted to exit the Hilton Hotel, where deputies had been meeting. Flores was grabbed and repeatedly hit by protesters but was not seriously injured. Another congressman fleeing demonstrations had the windows of his vehicle smashed; a protester was also slightly injured in the melee.

14. (U) In an expression of collective outrage, 11 top Ecuadorian daily newspapers issued a pointed, joint editorial, which appeared on the front page of all their

papers on March 9. Under the banner headline "Intolerable," the editorial notes that "The rivalries among the Executive, the Congress, and the TSE have created grave tensions that don't contribute to a resolution of the crisis". The editorial goes on to say that "pragmatic politics has its limits", noting that the majority of Ecuadorian voters had expressed a desire for change, but not "instability, the undermining of (government) institutions, and judicial insecurity". Citizen Participation, a respected, non-partisan, NGO (which receives U.S.-funding), issued a statement appealing to all political actors to resolve the conflict in a public, transparent manner, and to stop interpreting the constitution "for their own convenience." The president of the Catholic Church's Episcopal Conference on March 9 publicly called for calm and more respectful political dialogue.

Correa Gloats, Congress Seeks Compromise

15. (C) President Correa and his administration remain unwilling to intervene in the ongoing dispute between the Congress and the TSE. Minister of Government Larrea affirmed that the TSE had correctly enforced the law. On March 8, Correa took to the balcony of the Presidential Palace to support TSE's decision to strip 57 deputies of their political rights, calling it a well-deserved defeat for the "partidocracia" and a victory for the people. Correa told a relatively small crowd that the opposition must realize that they have lost and crowing that "they cannot defeat (our assembly)." A defiant Correa exhorted his supporters to defend the assembly but reject violence on March 9. The usually diplomatic Foreign Minister, Maria Fernanda Espinosa, also entered the fray, saying that Ecuador's image abroad would not be affected by recent political developments, and that Ecuador was privileged to be living in times of "citizen revolution."

16. (C) The Correa government has refused to join efforts seeking negotiated resolution of the conflict between Congress and the TSE. Instead, members of Congress are considering sending a delegation to the OAS in Washington officially asking for help. Some opinion makers are also suggesting possible intervention by local bishops or the Government of Spain.

17. (C) President of Congress Jorge Cevallos (PRIAN)--not among those dismissed--has emerged as the politician most actively brokering talks with all factions. He has promoted a proposal by Rene Mauge, the ID-RED representative on the TSE board, whereby Congress would overturn its decision to

SIPDIS

replace TSE President Jorge Acosta. Cevallos has convoked a special session of Congress for the evening of March 9, to discuss the issue.

18. (C) According to the opposition, the Correa government is reportedly wooing allies from among the 57 alternate legislators with offers of influence and cash, seeking to cobble together a majority in favor of the national constituent assembly in time for the next session of Congress on March 13. The TSE plans to swear in the new Congress members (who ran for office with their predecessors, and represent the same political parties) on Monday. A PSC Congressional deputy, Ruben Teran, told PolOff on March 8 that the deal Cevallos is pursuing has support among the removed deputies, but PSP is opposed to any deal that keeps Acosta in office. PSP party leader Gilmar Gutierrez again denounced Acosta on March 9 calling him a "bagman" for the Correa administration and alleging that the TSE vote to strip the 57 congress members was orchestrated by MinGov Gustavo Larrea. PSP insiders have told the Embassy that Lucio Gutierrez believes that Acosta was bought off by Correa forces with \$2 million in cash. He and Alvaro Noboa are also reportedly concerned that Cevallos might have been bought off as well.

A Role for the Constitutional Court?

¶9. (C) Adding a new institution to the fray, the Constitutional Court announced March 8 that it would rule on Congress' petition against the constitutionality of the TSE's decision to modify the constituent assembly statute. Normally, a ruling would take 45 days. Five of the court's nine justices are popularly viewed as representatives of the PSC. Correa has already denounced any possible decision by the Court against the assembly as illegitimate.

Anxiety in Guayaquil

¶10. (C) While the political developments unfold in Quito, the base of opposition strategizing and hopes for mounting a successful counter-move is shifting to Guayaquil. The Consul General spoke with Guayaquil Mayor Jaime Nebot the evening of March 8. Nebot expressed his "outrage" at the situation, referring to Correa as a "communist, terrorist and tyrant" throughout the conversation. Nebot stated that he "and the majority of Guayaquil's population would not put up with" the TSE's actions and the government's unwillingness to act,

SIPDIS

which he considered "an attack on Guayaquil." However, Nebot claimed he did not want the situation to escalate into confrontation between pro and anti-government forces on the streets of Guayaquil. There is still talk in Guayaquil about organizing a major march in protest to the government's recent actions, but no date has been announced. Guayaquil's political and economic elite have planned at least two weekend strategy sessions at the beach resort in Salinas to plot a strategy to counter Correa. Coastal moderates who had supported Correa's drive for change have been dismayed by his domineering approach and are increasingly looking to Nebot to contain the President.

Comment

¶11. (C) Media and other civil society reaction offers hope for eventual negotiated resolution of this political conflict, but no easy way out is in sight, with all institutions involved at least partially suspect or discredited, and Correa still feeling the winds of popular support at his back.

¶12. (C) Absent a negotiated deal between the Congress and the TSE this weekend, the question will be whether the opposition parties can control their second string deputies. Should they refuse to take office, the crisis will fester, and Ecuador will be without a Congress. Another scenario could see enough alternates step in to meet the required 58-person quorum in Quito, perhaps even as a self-proclaimed alternate congress of the deposed deputies sets up shop in Guayaquil. Correa has no interest in reinstating a Congress committed to delaying his assembly, but the damage to Ecuador's image would grow daily if Congress were effectively neutralized or dissolved. In that situation, an OAS mission (already invited to observe the April 15 elections, not to mediate) headed by respected Chilean Senator Viera-Gallo, could help broker some kind of compromise solution.

JEWELL